

Knowing Jesus

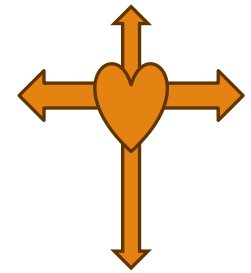
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Understanding the attributes of God is foundational to the Christian faith. So is this truth: Christianity is a RELIGION OF RELATIONSHIP. Specifically, Christianity is all about two relationships:

- The vertical relationship when God's love reaches down to us and our love reaches up to God.
- The horizontal relationship of our love reaching out to others in this world.



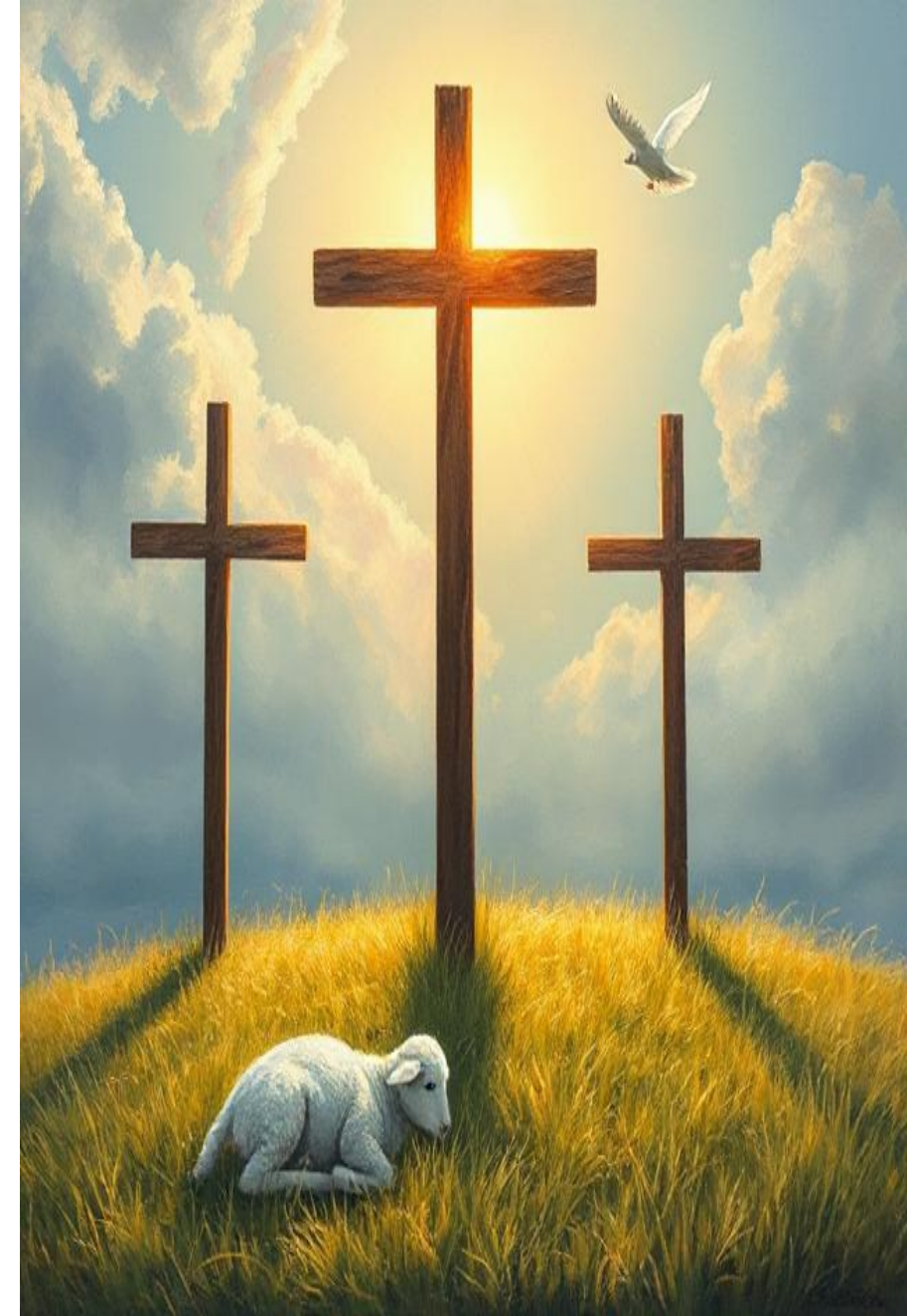
You can't be in any serious relationship with another person, much less be in a *love* relationship, unless you really know them. Anything less than love that begins with mutual understanding is infatuation or lust, which is fragile and fleeting. It's no different when we are seeking a transformative relationship with God.

God loves us because He is our Creator, Father, Lord, and Friend. He knows who we are because He knit us together in our mothers' wombs (Psalm 139), and He loves us unconditionally and eternally. In this section, we'll begin building a love relationship with God by really getting to know Him.

GOD IS TRIUNE. God (also called the Godhead) is actually three Persons with unique characteristics and purpose who form one entity. I do not say three “personalities” because that implies the Trinity is three facets of one being rather than three co-equal partners existing as one Godhead. Those three beings are God (the Father), Jesus Christ (the Son), and the Holy Spirit (or Spirit). This concept of a three-in-one Godhead confuses some people. My favorite analogy is to think of a braid, which is three individual strips woven together into a beautiful whole.

GOD IS COMMUNAL. He is three Persons mutually indwelling one another. This means that all three Persons of the Godhead work, think, and act as one. They live an existence of mutual life-giving, self-giving, and self-sacrificing love, a constant interchange of love in which one always puts the needs and welfare of the other two first. There is no hierarchy because there is no separation between the three. The Persons of the Godhead complement one another and proceed from one another (the Son proceeds from the Father, the Spirit proceeds from the Son). At different points in the Bible, we see different Persons of the Godhead in the forefront directing the flow of events. It is God the Father who speaks to Moses in Egypt and speaks blessings as He claims His Son at the baptism of Jesus Christ (Matthew 3:16-17). It is Son who is made flesh whom we know as Jesus Christ in the New Testament who ministers and teaches on earth and sacrifices Himself for our sins. It is the Holy Spirit who descends on the apostles as fire at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-3) so that the Spirit might indwell in the apostles.

The salvation of mankind is a collaborative work of the Holy Trinity, not a single event. It is a continuing process of conviction, repentance, justification, sanctification, and redemption that will continue until the second coming of Christ. It combines God’s redemptive plan with Christ’s sacrifice and the transformative presence of the Spirit in believers.



The role/purpose of the Father is to be Creator of all things in heaven and on earth, the source of all life, and the ultimate authority over all things in heaven and on earth and in the universe. The scope of His power and majesty was displayed in the six days of creation (remembering that time as we know it and time as God knows it are very different). His intelligence and power is evident in the complexity and perfection of creation. His love and mercy is visible throughout history in His redemption plan for mankind.

The Son took on flesh, suffering, and death for the purpose of becoming the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of mankind. He is the mediator between God and mankind, our path back into relationship with the Father.

The Holy Spirit indwells the believer, convicting us of our sins and God's judgment and righteousness so that we repent. He empowers the transformation of the believer's heart, compelling us to serve and witness for God. He illuminates the scriptures so that we understand God's will and teachings. He seals the believer as a confirmed child of God (Ephesians 1:13-14).





Our ability to fully comprehend all that is the Holy Trinity is limited by human language, perspective, and reason. It is made possible when the truth of God is received with faith of the heart. Even our limited understanding of God compels us to respond to Him in humility and gratitude for the enduring grace of our transcendent God. How do we grow in our understanding of this Doctrine of the Holy Trinity? We learn through the guidance of the Spirit, by the practice of prayer, study of the Bible, and fellowship both with God through the Spirit and with other believers (particularly in the church community).

What will the Scriptures teach us about God's attributes and nature?

God is LOVE. You've possibly heard that statement or seen it on a bumper sticker or t-shirt. It is a simple phrase that is inadequate to express the depth and scope of God's love. He doesn't just feel love or express love, He is the *source* of love, the *embodiment* of love, and the *definition* of love. God's love is evidenced by His intimate involvement in creation and in the lives of man. Out of His boundless love, the Father created mankind to be in relationship with Him. Out of love, He made a plan to restore mankind into relationship with Him after the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden brought sin into the world and infected mankind. Out of boundless love, the Son became flesh so that He could take the sins of mankind onto Himself and become the one perfect atoning sacrifice for those sins to make this restoration complete.

From these facts, we can also see that God is IMMANENT (near to us) even as He is also TRANSCENDENT in power, justice, grace, righteousness, and a holiness beyond our comprehension. Love is the motivation of all God does and the foundation of His relationship with us.



God is JUST, committed to what is right and fair. His justice ensures that sin and wrongdoing will not go unpunished. However, God's justice is rooted in His other attributes of RIGHTEOUSNESS, GRACE, MERCY, and FORGIVENESS. This means that there will be a day when every man and woman will be judged by God, but that Jesus will be there to mediate for those who believe in Him. God has ensured that there is a path out of sin and into forgiveness and redemption through Jesus as a gift of His grace and mercy.

God is FAITHFUL (Lamentations 3:22-23) and COMPASSIONATE. This means that God will fulfill every one of His covenants and promises to mankind. He will provide for us and guide us. He remains near to us despite our fallen, sinful nature, not forsaking us but showing us that we can trust in Him as our provider and constant help.

These qualities---love, justice, mercy, faithfulness, compassion---are qualities that God shares with the human race that He created because He has placed His Spirit within us (God's communicable attributes). There are other attributes of God that are incommunicable, in other words unique to Him (qualities that man does not and cannot possess).

God is ETERNAL, meaning that He exists outside of time. God encompasses all of the past, the present, and the future simultaneously. He has complete SOVEREIGNTY over time along with His authority over all of creation. Because God is not subject to time, He is UNCHANGING or IMMUTABLE (Malachi 3:6). All aspects of God's nature---His holiness, grace, justice, etc.---will not change. He will never change. This assures us that His character and promises remain reliable and true until the end of time. The God who led the Israelites out of Egypt is the same God who hears our prayers today and the same God with whom the faithful will dwell in the eternal kingdom (also called the New Jerusalem). We can put our trust and hope in Him.

As CREATOR of all things in the heavens and earth, God has absolute authority and power over all things (OMNIPOTENCE). This means that God can accomplish anything that He wills; nothing is too difficult or impossible with God. At the same time, God is all-knowing (OMNISCIENT), with full knowledge of all things past, present, and future from the workings of the universe to right down to the heart and mind of every individual human heart. He knows the needs of all things great and small in creation and PROVIDES for those needs. He knows our moments of distress and His presence goes before us and beside us to make straight our paths. This is because God is OMNIPRESENT, meaning He is everywhere and *everywhen* simultaneously (Psalm 139:7-10). He is with us wherever we go. God is not distant from us; He is close to us and involved in our daily lives.

It should fill us with awe, reverence, and gratitude that we are fully known and completely loved by a God who is the source of life, our provider, our protector, and our source of hope for the future.

Because the Godhead is a community of three beings (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), we will see that God also thinks as a community and acts as a community. When He created Adam, he was creating a whole community known as mankind (for the seeds of every human that would exist began in Adam). The community of mankind would be rooted in the same love, mutual support, and self-giving that characterizes the relationship within the Holy Trinity. God sees mankind as a community (a concept we will unpack in depth as we move through this series). Only as a community can man become a moral, spiritual, and intellectual reflection of the God who created us, a concept called *imago dei* (“image of God”).



Until we explore *imago dei* in a future lesson, there are two truths to understand at this point:

- 1) The Christian church is called to live in a manner that reflects the unity, love, self-giving, and mutual support that exists within the Godhead.
- 2) The Word of God (the Bible) illuminates, guides, and inspires believers as individuals (thanks to the Holy Spirit indwelling us), but His words are directed to mankind as whole, the community of humanity. We are meant to live out the will of God as a community, supporting and raising up one another and making one another accountable out of love for one another. When the Book of Ephesians tells believers to put on the armor of God to resist evil, it means that the church as a community of believers should use this armor together in times of oppression, discouragement, spiritual backsliding, doubt, or fear.

Now that we've had our first glimpse of our Savior, Jesus Christ, as one person within the triune God who works as one for the salvation of all believers, let's take a closer look at Christ's identity and role in the Holy Trinity for it is a crucial foundational doctrine in Christianity.

CHRIST THE SON embodies God's love, grace, power, and redemption plans for mankind. "Son of God" does not mean that Jesus is literally the God's son in the human sense of the word. He is God's son in the sense that Jesus is God manifested in human form. Being "of God" meant that even as a human Jesus had the same nature of God (a concept that religious of the time considered blasphemy). For someone to be called "son of Man" simply means being called "human". Jesus was, indeed, God manifested as fully human. However, Jesus is called "Son of Man" in the Bible, which references the prophecy in Daniel 7:13-14. This means "Son of Man" is a title of deity for Jesus, who was the example of all God intended mankind to be.





The Bible states that the fullness of God's deity dwelled in the Son of Man. Including God's grace and truth. No human rabbi (teacher) had the authority to forgive sins or to be Lord over God's sabbath, or to execute judgment on mankind. The one whom Daniel's prophecy called "Son of Man" is the Messiah, who was given dominion over all an everlasting kingdom and would be worshipped by every race of mankind. He would sit at the right hand of God.

Additionally, as being fully human was a considerably lower status than being God, the term "Son of Man" is also a term reflecting Jesus' humility. From His birth in a manger, to a ministry of living without money or home (exemplifying trust and dependence upon the provision of God), to dining with sinners and ministering to lepers, to suffering an excruciating and shameful death in the ultimate act of self-sacrifice, humility was a hallmark of the life and ministry of Jesus.

What is meant by the term "Messiah"? The term refers to God's divinely appointed King, one who would deliver God's people and establish a kingdom of righteousness and peace. The Old Testament contains an estimated 300-400 prophecies about the Messiah (different religious traditions and interpretations yield a different total count of messianic prophecies). The count of how many of those prophecies were fulfilled by Jesus Christ also varies by religious tradition and method of interpretation (for example, the Christian interpretation estimates that Jesus Christ fulfilled at least 300 of the messianic prophecies while scholarly interpretations yield a lower number).

Within the Jewish nation of Israel, there were also different expectations of how the Messiah would "deliver" God's people.



In biblical times, the Jewish people were besieged by a series of wars and conquered by a succession of nations (often as divine punishment for failing in their covenant promises and worship of God, abandoning His ways to chase pagan gods and often horrific religious rites including child sacrifice). The Jewish people envisioned the Messiah as a leader who would deliver them out of the hands of their oppressors and establish a New Kingdom over which He would reign in righteousness and glory. A look at the prophecy in the Book of Isaiah 9:6-8 reveals the true Messiah Christ Jesus:

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.

He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.

The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this.

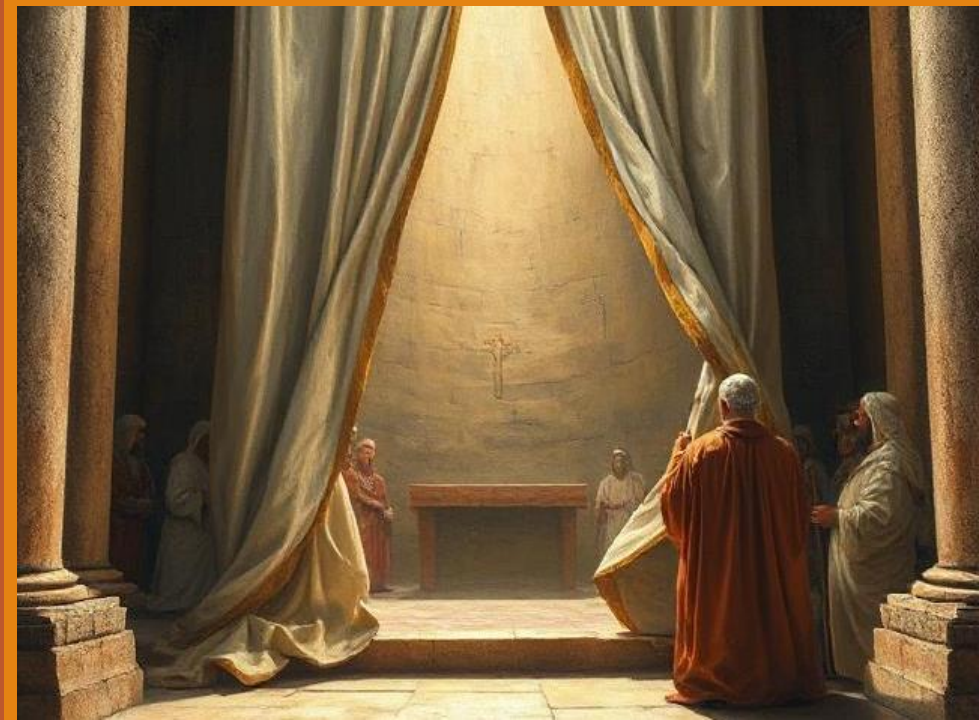
Jesus did not come to deliver Israel from the oppression of hostile nations. He came to deliver the people from their enslavement to sin and oppression by Satan.

When Adam and Eve succumbed to the temptation from Satan to eat of the forbidden Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they became contaminated by sin. Because the entire unborn race of mankind was within Adam, humanity also became contaminated by sin. It was no longer possible for the human race to be the *imago dei*. Man was meant to have the Holy Spirit indwell them (as we will discuss later in this lesson), but a holy God could not dwell in a vessel contaminated by evil. From that moment, God began to guide history towards the arrival of a Messiah who could atone for the sins of mankind and purify mankind to return to relationship with Him through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Until that time, God desired to be with His people. When He chose the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to be His chosen nation, God purposed to dwell among them personally, first in a tent called the tabernacle and later in a temple. God would dwell at the centermost room of the tabernacles and temple, a room that had to be purified according to His exact instructions by priests who also had to undergo ritual purifications to serve in the temple. The centermost room where God's presence dwelled was called the Holy of Holies. The room was separated from the rest of the temple by a heavy veil (curtain). Only the High Priest could enter, and then only after purification. The High Priest was the mediator between God and man, speaking to the Lord on behalf of mankind and returning with God's answers and instructions.

The moment that Jesus Christ died on the cross, atoning for mankind's sinful condition, the veil that separated God from mankind ripped in half. This is symbolic of Christ's purpose as Messiah: He removed the barriers between God and man physically with the tearing of the veil and spiritually by delivering the faithful from the oppression of sin. It was now possible for the Holy Spirit to indwell anyone who claimed Christ as their Savior. It was now possible for God's relationship with believers to be fully restored. Though mankind cannot be the true *imago dei* (only Christ is the perfect image of God because He is God), believers can now be the image of God *in Christ*. We become reflections of our Savior through transformative faith and the work of the Holy Spirit on our hearts.

Mankind would no longer need the priestly orders of the Pharisees or Sadducees to act as mediators between man and God. Christ Jesus became the ultimate High Priest for all humanity and the only Mediator that humankind needed to restore us to right relationship with God. We see, then, that The Son has many names: Christ Jesus, Son of God, Son of Man, Messiah, Mediator, High Priest, and Savior just to name a few.



During Jesus' earthly ministry, He performed many miracles. These were tangible displays of God's authority and power over all creation and heralded the arrival of the New Kingdom that had been prophesized in the Old Testament. The New Kingdom had broken through the fallen kingdom of Satan that had held the world in its grip, and Christ was the light of hope for this New Kingdom. This New Kingdom would be founded in God's unchanging love, justice, and righteousness.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Book of Matthew 5-7) outlined the ethical framework for His New Kingdom, presenting a new understanding of piety, morality, and spiritual transformation. This transformation would be an internal change brought about by the Holy Spirit and was required if believers were to become true disciples of Christ. Jesus invites us to believe and receive the indwelling Holy Spirit so that the Spirit can help us grow into spiritual maturity, develop, and share God's character.

Maturing spiritual to manifest God's commutable attributes in this world (including love, justice, mercy, grace, kindness, compassion, forgiveness) is how we become the image of God in Christ, reflecting God and the New Kingdom in the ways that we live, the decisions that we make, and the way we relate to others (whether they are believers or unbelievers).

Christ's ministry perfectly proved that God *is* love. Jesus demonstrated compassion, love, empathy, mercy, and grace to the marginalized, the overlooked, the suffering, the oppressed, and even to those people groups outside of the Jewish nation when they demonstrated faith in Him.



Examples of Jesus' mercy to the Gentiles and Samaritans can be found in the Book of John 4:5-6, Matthew 15:21, and Luke 17:11-19 to name a very few. When a centurion in the city of Capernaum begged Jesus' help healing a servant and believed that Jesus could accomplish this healing with only a word, Jesus declared: "Truly I tell you I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith". Remember: God knows our hearts and sees the sincerity of our faith.





In His life on earth, Jesus showed unwavering commitment to God, always submitting to the will of the Father right up to choosing suffering and death on the cross to pay the penalties of sin on mankind's behalf. This sacrificial act for our salvation was a profound demonstration of God's unchanging love and the self-giving, humble, submissive relationship within the Holy Trinity (a relationship in which believers can now share thanks to God's intervention on our behalf). Those who believe in Christ the Savior and Messiah, repent of sinfulness, and live by Jesus' example and teachings are made clean in the eyes of God. They can walk in restored relationship with the Father.

So great was the Father's love for humanity that He set forth this plan for our redemption, a plan that began there in the Garden of Eden after the fall of Adam and Eve. His unchanging love and faithfulness made possible God's commitment to that promised restoration regardless of how many times mankind was unfaithful to Him in return. God completed the work of our salvation personally. There can be no greater proof of God's love, His mercy and grace, His faithfulness, His provision for us, or the truth that He alone is worthy of our faith, trust, and reciprocal love.

God's omnipotence over all things—including life and death—was fully revealed when He raised Christ from the dead. God truly can (and will) do all that He promises to do, for nothing is impossible with God.

All aspects of Christ's ministry exemplify the harmonious purpose and actions of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father established the redemption plan and actively intervened to direct history according to this plan. The Son willingly became the perfect atoning sacrifice and mankind's path to salvation. Jesus was conceived in Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit. The Father and the Holy Spirit were present at the baptism of the Son. When believers are baptized in the

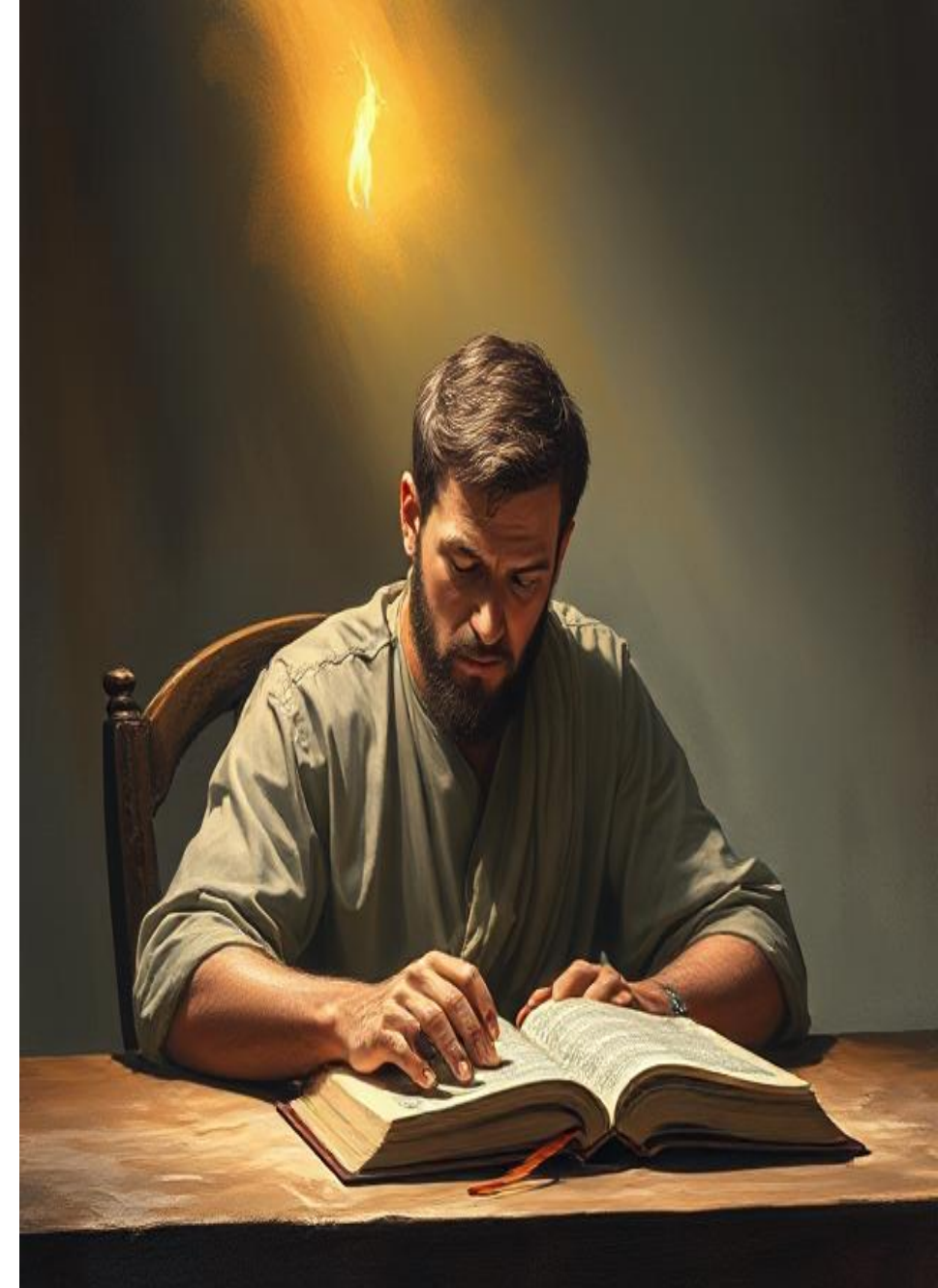


in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit worked alongside the Son in Christ's ministry, empowering Jesus to perform miracles, speak with God's authority, and to live in perfect obedience to God's will. The Son suffered the cross. The Father raised the Son from the dead in final victory over death and the sin. The Son ascended to heaven so that the Holy Spirit could begin the work of sanctification of the believers. The Holy Spirit descended as fire and empowered the apostles and other believers to illuminate the Word of God so that they could boldly and truthfully proclaim the Gospel of Christ. The Spirit empowered the miracles of the apostles, enabling them (and all believers) to live in a way that pleased God. Such is the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians today.

The Holy Spirit continuously works in the lives of believers today, indwelling and empowering them to also live in way that pleases God. The Spirit guides us, illuminates the Scripture so that we can rightly discern God's will and apply it to our lives. The Spirit helps believers resist the temptation of sins. When we do stumble and sin, the Spirit makes us aware of our sins (a process called conviction) so that we can turn away from unrighteous behavior (repentance) with deeper commitment to relationship with Christ and experience the joy of God's forgiveness. This is the transformative inward working of the Spirit to shape us into the image of God in Christ. As with the apostles and believers of the early Christian church, the Spirit helps believers to endure hardships, persecution, and adversity. This transformation is evidenced when our lives show the spiritual fruits of the Holy Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control, the greatest fruits being love of God and love for people).

The Holy Spirit also builds up and empowers the Christian church for the work of God and the spread of the Gospel message in the world. Such gifts might include the ability of believers to miraculously speak or interpret other languages, to engage in powerful, life-altering prayers, perform miracles, discern between spirits, obtain wisdom and discernment from the Lord, or to prophesize about God's will or actions. Believers must be cautious not to abuse such gifts when they do manifest within the congregation or to become prideful over such blessings. The Apostle Paul rebuked the church in Corinth for such pridefulness, especially when it became a stumbling block for believers. The true blessing and empowerment of the Holy Spirit in the church is the love, fellowship, and unity of the church of believers.

Believers must also beware of counterfeit spiritual encounters. The study of the Bible, when guided by the Holy Spirit, gives believers the discernment to recognize genuine manifestations of the Holy Spirit. It can be something as subtle as a gradual softening of the heart that makes the believer receive the Gospel message, or a not-so-subtle manifestation such as miraculous gifts like speaking in tongues. Remember that the enemy has the power to deceive people with false miracles and lead them away from God. The apostles of Christ encountered sorcerers who deceived people in such manner. These kinds of counterfeit experiences might include sensationalism, emotionalism, or a focus on personal experiences that are not, in fact, transformative, do not build up the church body of believers, and do not empower the spread of the Gospel message. They may involve "holy men" who are in truth cultish leaders who distort theology to exercise control over believers. This is why education in the Bible, the habit of prayer and meditation, and fellowship with the church body is so important. We also need this Spirit-guided wisdom so that we do not preach an erroneous Gospel and inadvertently cause other people to go astray or, worse, reject God.



The Bible had this advice for believers regarding prophecies: “*but test them all, hold on to what is good*” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). That is good advice for dealing with any form of theological question. When in doubt, the Bible is the unerring Word of God and our ultimate authority on any spiritual issue and in discerning good from evil and righteousness from wickedness. We will circle back to this point shortly.

We have spoken of the Triune God and *imago dei*. The triune God who made mankind in His image made man a tripartite being---we have a body, a soul, and a spirit. He breathed His own life into Adam so that man became a living soul. The soul is associated with the individual, the emotions, desires, and personality. It is the aspect of our being most vulnerable to temptation. The human spirit is most closely associated with relationship with God and spiritual consciousness, in fact the Holy Spirit dwells within the spirit of the believer, our connection to the life and love within the Trinity.

It is important to understand that the Holy Spirit is the vital, empowering, guiding force within the lives of believers and is actively involved in the daily fulfillment of God’s redemption plan for believers. We are to know the role of the Spirit in the Trinity, the church, and in our lives. We are to recognize the gifts and manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Finally, we are to prayerfully learn to discern the Spirit’s guidance every day if our lives are to be surrendered to God’s will, God’s purpose, and God’s love. The Holy Spirit is proof of the promise of God’s abiding presence with believers and in the world and the source of God’s unending, empowering mercy and grace.



Having examined the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and spent some time getting to know the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, let's examine two more foundational Christian doctrines: The doctrine of inerrancy and the doctrine of inspiration. These two foundational principles relate to God's Word, the Holy Bible. The doctrine of inerrancy means that the original manuscripts of the Bible are free from errors in their central, cohesive message of salvation through Jesus Christ. The doctrine of biblical inspiration refers to the Holy Spirit's role in inspiring and guiding the authors of the biblical scriptures to ensure the Bible's teachings are the cohesive, truthful, divine Word of God.

Jesus is also referred to as "the Word" in the Bible (particularly in the opening verses of the Book of John, which reads: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

We have just examined how Jesus is part of the Godhead, the Holy Trinity, the source of life and the light of truth for mankind. What does it mean when Jesus is called the Word? This verse refers to the creation narrative in Genesis 1, in which God spoke creation into existence. John is stating that Jesus was the Word through which God created the world (which is another demonstration of the Trinity working in unity of purpose). John is saying that all things were made through Jesus. The life of the Trinity was in Jesus, and through God's direct actions in Christ life was given to all creation. When God commands: "*Let there be Light*", the light in this world that manifested to drive back darkness was Christ (symbolic of Christ as the Light which drives back the darkness of wickedness and sin even today and the light through which victory over the enemy was accomplished at the Resurrection and will be finalized in the second coming). John speaks of Jesus manifested among men during His earthly ministry, the invisible Godhead made visible so that through Him all mankind had a path to salvation.

The Bible is also the Word of God. Christian knowledge of the history of our faith and our understanding of God's will for our life ethically, morally, and spiritually are all founded on the teachings of these scriptures.



The doctrine of inerrancy is the faith that the Bible is free from errors in its central message of salvation through Jesus Christ and its teachings on morality and faith. We know that the scriptures were written by multiple, diverse authors over a period spanning centuries. They were written in various cultural and historical contexts and different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek). Despite these diverse origins, the Bible's teachings are cohesive.

Why? Because of the eternal, omnipresent, omniscient Godhead. Every biblical author was guided by the indwelling Holy Spirit in the writing of the Bible.

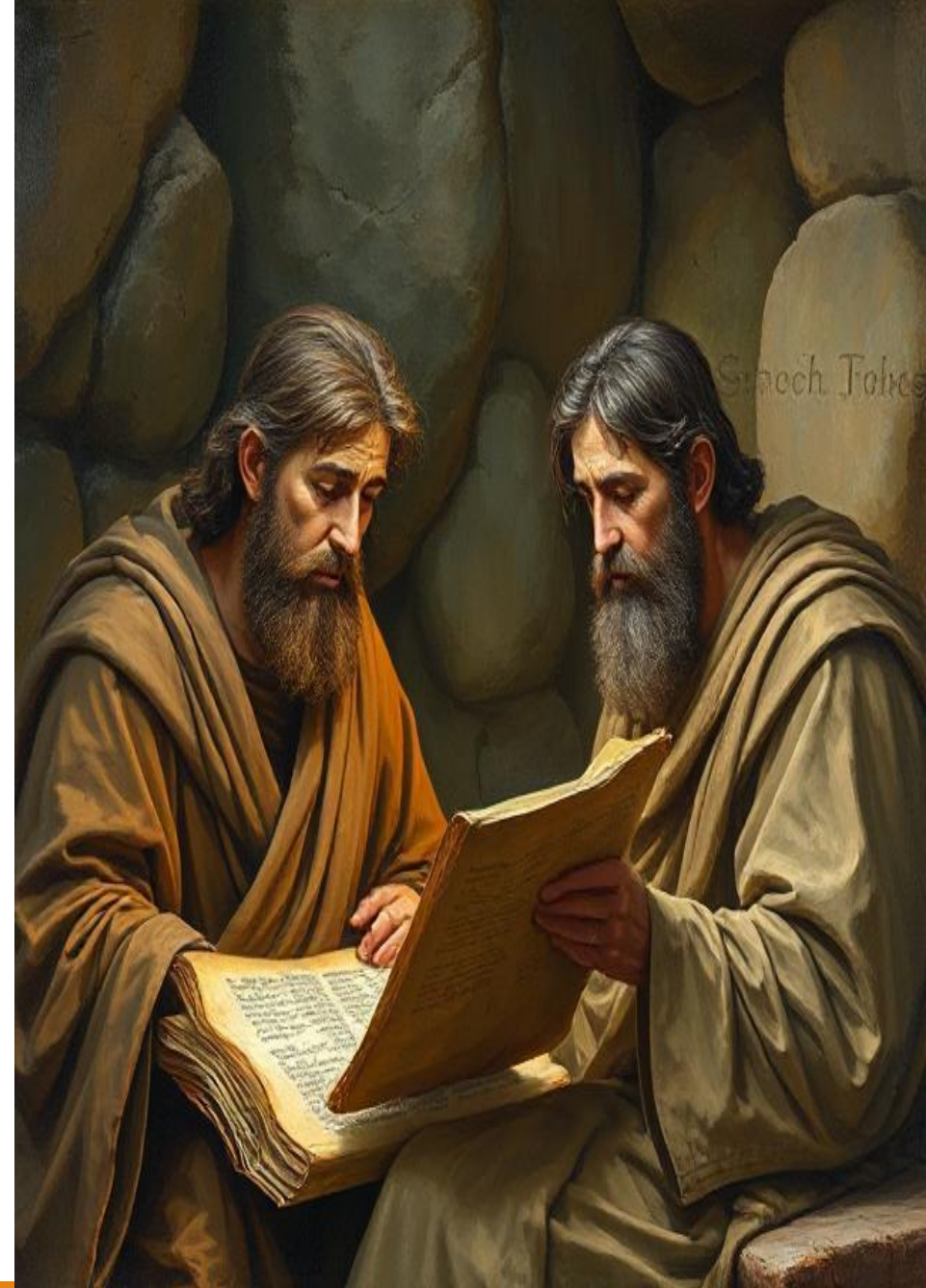
The modern world disputes the truth of the Bible, pointing to minor discrepancies, questioning the science of the writings. How do believers resolve such debates and rightly understand and interpret the Bible? We begin with three basic facts: The Bible is not a history book in the textbook sense. The Bible is not a scientific textbook. The Bible is NOT fiction.

We first approach God and His Word with prayer for the Holy Spirit's guidance and discernment and hearts and minds that are humbly receptive to what God wishes to reveal to us in our study. The more we learn about God and the history of His people and church, the more we grow in comprehension. Our God is multifaceted, revealing more about Himself the longer we are in relationship with Him. The same is true of His Word: Each time we re-read the same book, chapter, and verse of the Bible, the Spirit yields new insights and wisdom.

Believers should also consider the cultural and historical contexts in which each book of the Bible was written to more fully comprehend its meaning.

For example, the Books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (the Gospels) tell the story of the events of Christ's earthly ministry. Each author, however, includes different details and emphasizes different aspects of Jesus because they each have a different, specific purpose in their writing. Matthew writes to present Jesus as King, so his presentation of Christ's ministry comes from that perspective. Mark wanted to present Christ as the suffering servant as the Old Testament prophesized and also as the Son of God. John presents Jesus as the God, the pre-existent divine Word of God, and the self-revelation of God. He also emphasized Christ's teachings on social justice and His concern for women. Matthew, Mark, and John wrote as apostles who were actively witnesses to Christ's ministry. Luke was also the only Gentile to write a book of the Bible (all other biblical authors were Jewish). Luke was a companion of the apostle Paul. He was not a firsthand witness to Jesus but meticulously composed His Gospel narrative through careful research, study, and interviews with witnesses. He even researches and traces the genealogy of Christ Jesus all the way back to Adam and Eve. Perhaps because Luke comes from the Gentile people, who are "adopted" into the nation of God because of the sacrifice of Christ, His writings focus on the global significance and inclusiveness of Christ's ministry. Knowledge of those contexts helps the believer reconcile the differences in each of the four Gospel books.

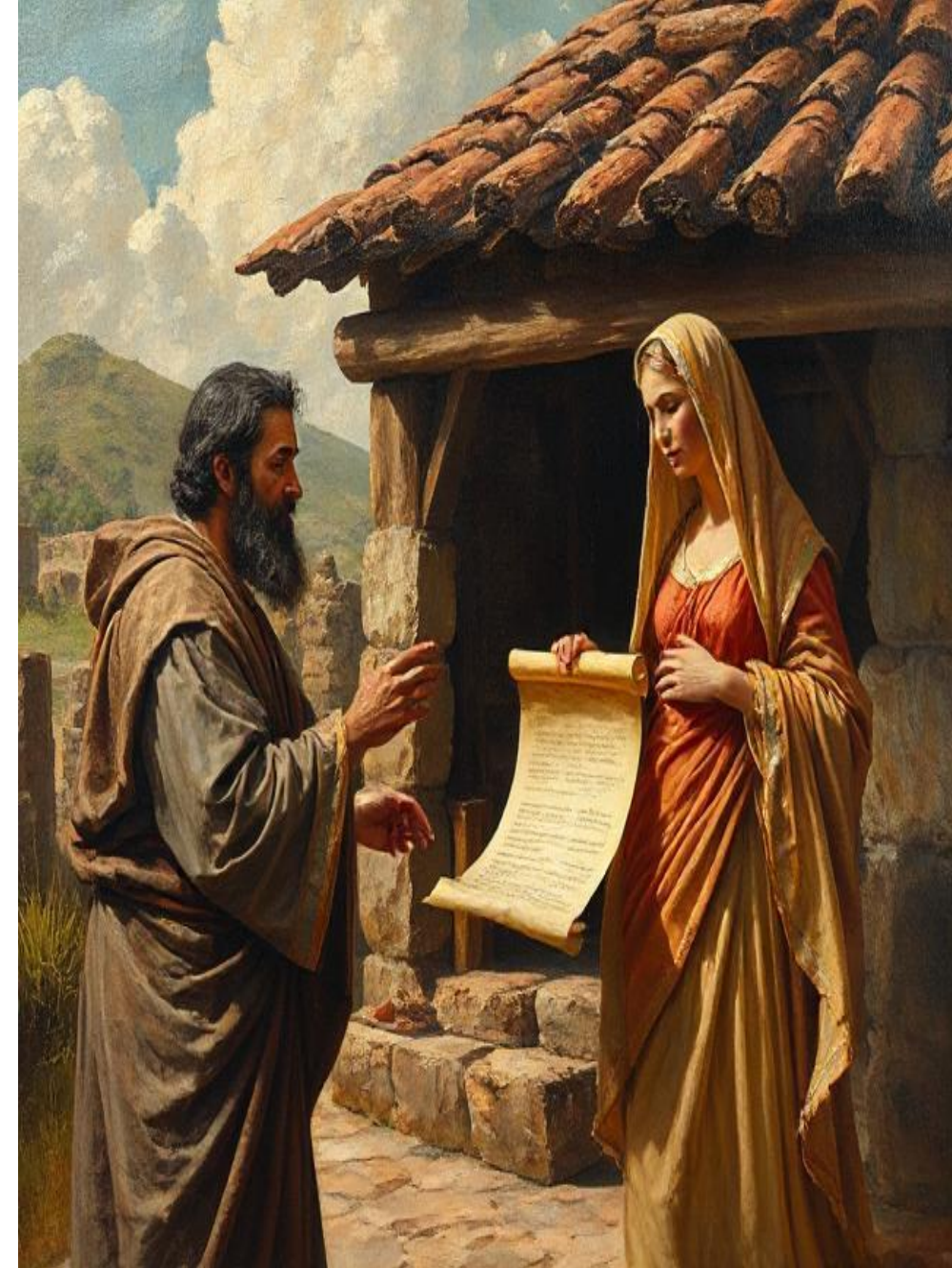
Culture and historical context also yields accurate interpretation and application of the specific teachings in the Bible. For example, Jesus prohibits divorce except in the case of adultery (Matthew 19:9), which is sometimes a stumbling block for modern believers. We must consider the context. Women held no true status or power in the biblical eras. Mosaic Law permitted men to divorce their wives if they found something offensive or indecent in her.



However (as with most of the Law), human interpretation gradually allowed for abuse of God's Law. By the era of Jesus, a man could cast out his wife if she cooked a meal badly or if he found a woman who was more desirable. The wife was then left destitute and desperate. This was not God's purpose when He established the Law. Jesus' prohibition of divorce was meant to protect women from such abuses, to remind people of God's requirement that believers mirror His love in how they treat one another. God considers a husband and wife to be of one flesh. Marriage is so important to God that it is used in the Bible as a metaphor for believers

There are also multiple literary genres and styles in the books of the Bible, including the narrative, historical accounts, apocalyptic writing, poetry, hyperbole, symbolism, genealogies, songs, metaphors, and parables. For example, the metaphorical teaching that Jesus is the Lamb of God obviously should not be interpreted as Jesus literally being a Lamb. The symbolism of the Lamb refers to the Old Testament Book of Exodus. When God sent the plague of death upon Egypt, the Jewish people sacrificed perfect lambs and spread the blood of the lambs on their doors. This act of faith brought God's mercy, and their children were spared from death. Jesus' perfect life and sacrificial death and the believers' receiving it with faith saves them from eternal death and separation from God. Right interpretation requires that we know the historical and cultural context as well as interpreting "Lamb" as a metaphor.

Accurate interpretation and right application of God's Word is essential to forming a sound biblical theology and for correctly preaching and teaching the Word. There are many kinds of errors of interpretation.



One of the most common is “proof-texting”, which is taking a Bible verse out of context and apply it universally, neglecting the Bible’s comprehensive teaching on the subject. Matthew 23:9 reads: “Call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father who is in heaven”. Out of context, this sets the stage for disrespecting and disobeying our biological fathers. We must consider the whole of the Bible, beginning with the Ten Commandments which state to honor our fathers and mothers. RIGHT interpretation with historical and cultural context recognize that this passage was a reproach of prideful Pharisees who were seeking glory by being called father/Rabbi (teacher) without humility. Ephesians 5:22 tells wives to obey their husbands as they would God. Out of context, this would seem to give husbands abusive authority over their wives. The whole of biblical teaching tells husbands to be right and holy men and to love their wives as much as they love themselves, up to being willing to sacrifice themselves for their wives and children just as Christ sacrificed Himself. Proof-texting is a means by which believers can fall pretty to cultish leaders and false teachings. Pray for the discernment of the Spirit and seek the counsel of spiritually mature believers if you have any questions about interpreting any part of the Bible.

With all this in mind, we find that the Bible has a unified, concise message. When rightly applied, it is the trustworthy teachings of God. Evaluate the things and teachings of this world by what is taught in the Bible. Remember to use prayer, reflection, meditation, and the Word as your foundation for relationship with Jesus Christ, and trust that He is present with you no matter where you go. What the Lord has promised you in the Bible, He is faithful to deliver.



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